

Original Research Article

Graduate Education and Its Influence on Employability and Career Progression: A Tracer Study of La Salle University Graduates

ABSTRACT

Aims: This research explores the impact of graduate education on the employability and career advancement of graduates from La Salle University's DBA, MBA, and MPA programs from 2018 to 2022. It further aims to glean insights on how the results of the tracer study can improve graduate curriculum and practices.

Study design: Descriptive Research.

Place and Duration of Study: School of Graduate Studies, La Salle University Ozamiz, Ozamiz City Philippines AY 2018-2022.

Methodology: This study involved 127 respondents who graduated from Doctor in Business Administration (DBA), Master in Business Administration (MBA), and Master in Public Administration (MPA) in the School of Graduate Studies, La Salle University Ozamiz from AY 2018-2019 to AY 2021-2022. Of this number, 42 (33%) were males and 85 (67%) were females; majority (54%) took up MBA while 27% graduated in 2021. Further, 86% were permanent employees while 68% worked in local public institutions. A tracer survey form was forwarded to the students through email and social media accounts. After the results were collated, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the results.

Results: The findings reveal that 60% of the respondents received promotions, and 65% reported salary increases after completing their graduate programs. Additionally, 85% cited professional development as the primary reason for enrolling, with them reporting enhanced work performance and career growth as a result of their education. The study also highlights that graduates felt highly satisfied (4.51) with the curriculum, especially its emphasis on values formation (4.73) and the integration of ethical principles (4.69), which they believed positively influenced their professional behavior.

Conclusion: This research shows that graduate education is a valuable investment, boosting job security, earnings, and career satisfaction. It helps students develop important skills like teamwork, problem-solving, and ethical decision-making, making them more competitive. The study suggests graduate programs focus on professional and ethical growth while adding hands-on experiences and industry projects to better prepare students for workforce demands.

Keywords: graduate education, business programs, employability, promotion, program satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

The demand for the employability of graduates of a higher education institution determines the effectiveness of its academic degree programs. For graduate and postgraduate programs,

the promotion and/or salary increase received by the masteral and doctoral graduates gauges the efficacy of the offered programs. These metrics are measured through a graduate tracer survey.

A graduate tracer survey is a tool used to track the graduates of an academic institution in terms of their employability and promotion, the application of learned competencies, as well as the effectiveness of the curriculum implementation and its relevance to students' current employment. Rosmawati (2017) and Woya (2019) explained that the information gathered in a tracer study is vital to the improvement of the quality of education and in the identification of areas for improvement. The results of the tracer study further determine the marketability and sustainability of graduate studies.

As the Philippine Commission on Higher Education fully implements Memorandum 15 series of 2019 Policies and Guidelines for Graduate Education, it becomes even mandatory for graduate institutions to evaluate its programs for their relevance, practicality, and contributions to the graduates' pursuit of their careers within their respective job markets. With the constant evolution of the job market and the socio-economic system as well as the rapid advancement of science and technology, qualifications, conditions, and competencies required for people joining the workforce have evolved as well, deeming it necessary for graduate institutions to keep up with the demand.

A study by Lopena and Madrigal (2023) revealed that the graduates' satisfaction with program delivery and instruction would lead to the development of their knowledge, skills and competencies, and ultimately enhancing their social and economic status. This is seconded by Twang (2022) in her study which found that graduate students increased their odds of a good placement in a job or in a promotion, thereby also increasing their chances of a higher salary. The skills and competencies acquired in their further studies would give them an edge over other applicants for the position. In the past, having a college degree was often enough for a fresh graduate to start their career. Nowadays, however, a college degree does not carry as much value in most job markets (Awwad, 2021). In fact, Dela Cruz (2023) found in their study that a graduate degree enhances employees' job performance owing to their personal and professional growth. Employees who are graduate degree holders are not only given better opportunities for a better-paying job, get a regular job position, and be considered for a job promotion, they are also more committed to spend their time and effort to better serve all the stakeholders. Improving one's knowledge and applying the learning outcomes from their graduate courses to their respective work environments are just some of the identified benefits of a graduate education to the work performance of employees.

It is then imperative that graduate institutions assess the impact of their graduate programs on the employability of its graduates. Higher employability and promotion mean that the graduates are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies that will enable them to work in their respective field.

The human capital theory by Becker and Schultz (as cited in Petchko, 2018) supports this claim as they posit that further education and training can result in more productive and efficient workers. Their abilities and skills which may include effective communication skills, people management, problem solving abilities among others, may be enhanced or increased through additional training and graduate education.

Using this theory, this study is then conducted to determine the employability and promotion of La Salle University graduates of its Doctor in Business Administration (DBA), Master in Business Administration (MBA), and Master in Public Administration (MPA) programs from AY 2018-2022. Specifically, it sought to determine the extent of contribution of the respondents'

graduate degrees to their present employment as well as their level of satisfaction with program delivery and implementation. Moreover, their reasons for enrolling in the graduate program were also identified.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study used the descriptive-survey type of research. According to Jackson (2009), in this type of research, the respondents answer the tracer survey questionnaires, and the responses are described accordingly.

2.2 Research Respondents

This descriptive study involved 127 respondents who graduated from their graduate programs DBA, MBA, and MPA in the School of Graduate Studies of La Salle University Ozamiz from AY 2018-2019 to AY 2021-2022. Of this number, 42 (33%) were males and 85 (67%) were females; majority (54%) of them took up MBA while 27% of the respondents graduated in 2021. Further, 86% were permanent employees while 68% worked in local public institutions.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Indicators	DBA	MBA	MPA	Total	Percentage
Gender					
Male	2	22	18	42	33%
Female	1	46	38	85	67%
Total	3 (2%)	68 (54%)	56 (44%)	127	100%
Year Graduated					
2022		18	4	22	17%
2021	2	22	10	34	27%
2020	1	8	12	21	17%
2019		13	10	23	18%
2018		7	20	27	21%
Total	3	68	56	127	100%
Employment Status					
Regular/Permanent	3	53	53	109	86%
Contractual/Casual/Temporary		10	3	13	10%
Unemployed		3	2	5	4%
Place and Type of Current Work					
Abroad		4	0	4	3%
Local Public	3	33	50	86	68%
Local Private		30	3	33	26%
Relevance of Graduate Degree to Current Job					
Related	3	54	44	101	80%
Not related		10	10	20	16%

2.3 Instrument of the Study

A survey questionnaire adapted from the Graduate Tracer Study prescribed by the Commission on Higher Education was used as the main instrument of gathering data from the respondents.

2.4 Data-gathering Procedure

A formal letter requesting the complete list of DBA, MBA, and MPA graduates from 2018-2022 and their contact information was sent to the Registrar's Office. Once the list was secured, communication was sent to the respondents requesting their consent and participation in the survey. Communication was done primarily through emails and social media messaging. The respondents were requested to answer the online survey questionnaire created through Google Forms which was sent to their respective email accounts. A mini focused group discussion with selected graduates was conducted to provide succinct details and verification of the results of the survey. A total of 6 graduates from across programs participated in the FGD done through Google Meet.

2.5 Statistical Treatment of Data

Mean, frequency and percentage distribution were used to analyze the data.

2.6 Limitations of the Study

The findings of the study represented only the experiences of the graduate business students, and not of the entire graduate population. Moreover, because the study relied on self-reported data, the responses may be influenced by memory recall particularly for graduates who completed their programs long before the study was conducted. Also, this study did not take into account external factors such as economic conditions or industry trends that may impact employability and career progression.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Promotion and Salary Increase Opportunities

Graduate education is considered as a good investment because of the benefits one can reap career-wise. A study conducted by the University of Michigan (2023) claimed that job prospects of both present employees and those looking for employment significantly improved after completing graduate school. Higher earning potential, more job opportunities, career advancement, networking opportunities, and increased job security were just some of the benefits of a graduate education. Table 2 shows the promotion and salary increase opportunities of the respondents.

In this present study, 76 (60%) of the respondents claimed to have been promoted in their line of work after graduation. All the 3 DBA graduates as well as 65% and 52% of the MBA and MPA graduates, respectively, received their work promotion. Moreover, 83 (65%) of the respondents received an increase in their salary after completing their graduate education. In fact, 6% of those who received salary increases claimed to have received triple and even quadruple increases in their salary. It can be noted that the number of respondents gaining a salary increase was higher compared to those who were promoted. This is because some of the respondents who were not promoted still received an increase in their salary rank after graduation. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2024), graduate degree holders generally earn more than those with only a bachelor's degree, with or without promotion. This means that graduate education can lead not only to faster career advancement, as well as higher positions and responsibilities, but also to higher and better income. This becomes a solid reason why graduate education becomes necessary.

Table 2. Promotion and Salary Increase Opportunities

Indicators	DBA	MBA	MPA	Total	Percentage
Promotion after Graduation					
Yes	3	44	29	76	60%
No		21	25	46	36
Unemployed		3	2	5	4%
Salary Increase after Graduation					
Yes	3	37	43	83	65%
Significant Increase		5	2	7	6%

3.2 Reasons for Enrolling in Graduate Programs

The respondents were then asked for their reasons for enrolling in a graduate program. Surprisingly, the respondents asserted that more than receiving promotion and ranking (53%), professional development (85%) was their primary reason for completing a graduate degree. This means that they wanted to further develop their skills and knowledge more than just aiming for a higher position or better job title. As a result, the graduates improved the way they performed their respective work assignments because of the professional growth gained, thereby gaining promotion or salary increase in consequence. Spilerman (1991) asserted in their study that promotion is not automatically awarded to an employee because of educational attainment; rather, only when the employee's graduate degree has helped them contribute to productivity can work advancement be considered. Furthermore, in a study commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014), it was revealed that employers consider aptitudes and attitudes of equal importance when hiring and/or promoting workers. It is therefore important for employees to continually improve their knowledge and skills to meet the demands and realities of the workplace.

Table 3. Reasons for Enrolling in Graduate Programs

Indicators	DBA	MBA	MPA	Total	Percentage
for professional development	2	62	44	108	85%
for promotion or ranking	1	31	35	67	53%
for salary increase		14	10	24	19%
to gain prestige		5	5	10	8%
for personal development		1		1	
for educational experience		1	1	2	

3.3 Contribution of Graduate Degree to Employment

This now leads to the question of the extent of contribution of the graduate degree to the respondents' current employment. Table 4 shows the results. For the DBA, MBA, and MPA respondents, the graduate degree they had completed in La Salle University Ozamiz led them to demonstrate ethics and ethical standards in terms of accountability and responsibility (4.69) and to perform business tasks with collaboration, competency, and efficiency (4.46). This means that the respondents' graduate education has positively influenced their ethical behavior, accountability, and responsibility in the workplace. Graduate courses such as Global Business Ethics, Social Responsibility, and Diversity (DBA), Business Ethics (MBA), Ethics and Ethical Standards in Public Service (MPA) were specifically included in the curriculum to integrate ethical principles and practice in doing business and government transactions. Moreover, value and character formation was honed through the integration of core Lasallian and Christian values.

Furthermore, students had acquired collaboration skills and demonstrated competent and efficient performance, which may have led to their promotion and/or salary increase. Group presentations and requirements, case study analysis, and research works were just some of the assessment requirements and tasks that helped graduate students hone their collaborative skills and develop their competence and proficiency in their respective fields. Gray and Koncz (2017) stressed that developing strong collaboration skills such as effective communication, conflict management, teamwork, and active listening skills allow individuals to integrate into a team quickly and effectively. As a result, they become key players in the growth and success of the company.

Overall, the respondents rated their graduate degree as highly contributory (4.44) to their present employment. The knowledge, skills, and competencies they have gained and acquired in their graduate degree programs have helped them navigate their work with ease and precision. This also means that the DBA, MBA, and MPA programs are effective inasmuch as they have successfully enhanced the employability of the graduates, ensuring that they have the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in their chosen fields.

Table 4. Extent of Contribution of Graduate Degree to Current Employment

Indicators	DBA	MBA	MPA	Average Mean	Verbal Description
1. address decisions with significance and relevance	4.5	4.27	4.45	4.40	Highly Contributory
2. communicate confidently and proficiently in the business/administration discipline	4.5	4.36	4.47	4.45	Highly Contributory
3. demonstrate ethics and ethical standards in terms of accountability and responsibility	5	4.50	4.71	4.69	Highly Contributory
4. extensive utilization of research in business or administrative functions	4.5	4.22	4.24	4.29	Highly Contributory
5. perform business tasks with collaboration, competency, and efficiency	5	4.34	4.37	4.46	Highly Contributory
6. pursue creative, systematic, and scientific processes in developmental studies aligned to the field of specialization	4.5	4.22	4.34	4.33	Highly Contributory
7. pursue independent studies aligned to the field of specialization	4.5	4.04	4.22	4.18	Moderately Contributory
Overall	4.64	4.28	4.4	4.4	Highly Contributory

4.21–5.00 Highly Contributory; 3.41–4.20 Moderately Contributory; 2.61–3.40 Contributory; 1.81–2.60 Fairly Contributory; 1.00–1.80 Not Contributory

3.4 Level of Satisfaction with Program Delivery and Implementation

Table 5 shows the level of satisfaction of the graduates with program delivery and evaluation. **Figure 1 also shows a graphical representation of the said results.** The results show that the respondents were very satisfied with the values formation they had acquired from their graduate education (4.73) as well as the curriculum or range of courses for their respective

programs (4.71). Values formation in education refers to the development of ethical, moral, and personal beliefs that guide one's behavior and decision-making. The students' high satisfaction in this area means that the program has effectively instilled in the students the meaningful values relevant to their personal and professional lives.

When asked to expound on this, some of the respondents gave the following statements:

One thing I find distinct in myself as a graduate of LSU is perseverance – the quality of the work that I am doing. I remember the time when I was taking my master's degree, I had so many works to do but I tried to make sure that I submit all the requirements on time and with quality that translates to do the work that I am doing. I always make sure to be persevering in the demands of the works that I do (GS4)

I am proud to say as a La Salle graduate, I uphold my values. I do not compromise my values and principles (GS1 and GS2).

I learned how to manage my personnel well and the Lasallian values I learned also taught me to be a selfless administrator to plan and to decide with the personnel more than your interest as an administrator (GS6).

On the other hand, students' high satisfaction with the curriculum suggests that they found the courses relevant, well-structured, and beneficial to their professional development. The curriculum design has integrated theory with practical applications which have prepared the students for various challenges and opportunities in their respective fields.

The master's degree that I have earned from Lasalle really helped me be do my responsibility as assistant manager. I am able to understand my colleagues with different characters or attitudes. I learned how to handle them with respect and understanding (GS5).

I can say that all the knowledge, skills and competencies that I have learned from La Salle University really helped me with my present position in my company. Everything I have studied and learned in Lasalle really helped me a lot in managing my colleagues. (GS3).

Zalazar-Jaime, et al. (2022) found that students' satisfaction is strongly linked to the relevance and practicality of the courses offered. When graduate programs align their curriculum with the current demands of the professional world and integrate real-world applications, students feel more prepared and engaged in their learning. The high satisfaction reported by the respondents in this study suggests that the curriculum was well-structured and effectively integrated theoretical knowledge with practical skills. This is significant considering that Lim et al. (2022) recommended in their report that educational institutions must design their curriculum to meet the demands of the industry and ensure that graduates are equipped with the necessary skills deemed valuable in the workforce.

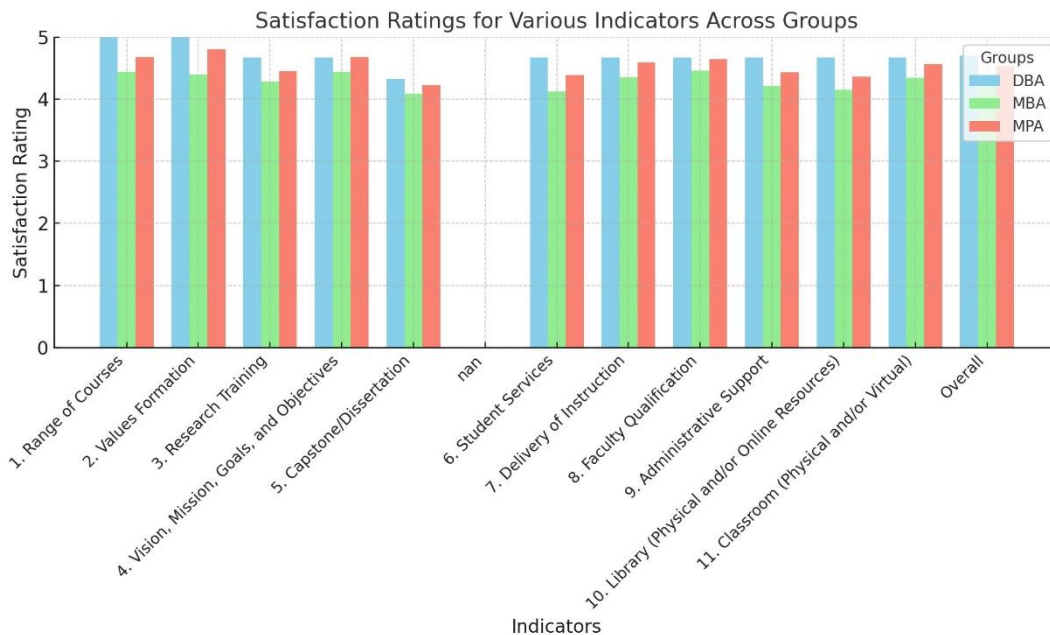
Table 5. Level of Satisfaction with Curricular Programs' Delivery and Implementation

Indicators	DBA	MBA	MPA	Average Mean	Verbal Description
1. Range of Courses	5	4.44	4.68	4.71	Very Satisfactory

2. Values Formation	5	4.40	4.80	4.73	Very Satisfactory
3. Research Training	4.67	4.28	4.45	4.47	Very Satisfactory
4. Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives	4.67	4.44	4.68	4.60	Very Satisfactory
5. Capstone/Dissertation	4.33	4.09	4.23	4.22	Moderately Satisfactory
6. Student Services	4.67	4.12	4.39	4.39	Very Satisfactory
7. Delivery of Instruction	4.67	4.35	4.59	4.54	Very Satisfactory
8. Faculty Qualification	4.67	4.46	4.64	4.59	Very Satisfactory
9. Administrative Support	4.67	4.21	4.43	4.44	Very Satisfactory
10. Library (Physical and/or Online Resources)	4.67	4.15	4.36	4.39	Very Satisfactory
11. Classroom (Physical and/or Virtual)	4.67	4.34	4.56	4.52	Very Satisfactory
Overall	4.70	4.30	4.53	4.51	Very Satisfactory

4.21–5.00 Very Satisfactory; 3.41–4.20 Moderately Satisfactory; 2.61–3.40 Satisfactory; 1.81–2.60 Fairly Satisfactory; 1.00–1.80 Not Satisfactory

Figure 1. Level of Satisfaction with Curricular Programs' Delivery and Implementation



All these findings affirm the importance of values formation and a well-designed curriculum in graduate education. These elements not only enhance students' personal and professional development but also contribute to their overall satisfaction with the program.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study proves that graduate education significantly enhances career prospects by providing graduates with better job opportunities, promotions, and salary increases. A graduate degree not only provides individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to advance in their careers but also makes them more competitive in the job market. As a result, graduate education acts as a stepping stone to better job security, higher positions,

and improved earning potential, making it a valuable investment for long-term career success. It is recommended that graduate programs continue to emphasize both professional development and ethical training to further enhance students' readiness for the workforce. Additionally, incorporating more industry-specific case studies and hands-on experiences could further bridge the gap between academic learning and professional practice, ensuring that graduates are even more prepared for the challenges of their careers.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence):

ChatGPT was used in generating the graphical illustration of Figure 1.

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